

Message Text

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ACTION H-03

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 4366

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP, SY
SUBJECT: VISIT OF CODEL HAMILTON

SUMMARY: CODEL HAMILTON DEPARTED SYRIA JULY 10 AFTER TWO-DAY VISIT DURING WHICH IT MET WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD, FONMIN KHADDAM, SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY LEADERS TOUTAH AND HAMRA, AND ATTENDED AMBASSADOR'S DINNER IN CODEL'S HONOR WITH A NUMBER OF HIGH SYRIAN OFFICIALS. CODEL EXPRESSED ITS PLEASURE OVER RESTRAINT AND SERIOUSNESS WHICH SYRIAN LEADERS DISPLAYED AND FELT THERE WAS HINT OF FLEXIBILITY IN ASSAD'S POSITION ON PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION AT GENEVA. IN ADDITION TO PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION ISSUE, CODEL PRESSED SYRIANS FOR FLEXIBILITY ON NATURE OF PEACE BUT WITHOUT ANY EVIDENT SUCCESS. EMBASSY BELIEVES CODEL VISIT WAS POSITIVE STEP IN US-SYRIAN DIALOGUE. END SUMMARY.

1. CODEL HAMILTON DEPARTED DAMASCUS JULY 10 WITH POSITIVE IMPRESSION OF ITS SHORT STAY HERE. FONMIN KHADDAM IN MEETING WITH CODEL JULY 9 (SEPTEL) HAD BEEN RIGID AND UNYIELDING TO CONGRESSMEN'S PROBING FOR ANY FLEXIBILITY ON ISSUES OF NATURE OF PEACE AND PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION AT GENEVA, THE TWO QUESTIONS WHICH CONGRESSMEN STRESSED IN ALL THEIR DISCUSSIONS WITH SYRIANS OFFICIALS. HOWEVER, CONGRESSMEN
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HAD BEEN PREPARED FOR KHADDAM'S STYLE BY AMBASSADOR DURING INITIAL BRIEFING AND WERE IN FACT IMPRESSED BY FONMIN'S RELATIVE RESTRAINT. DELEGATION CAME AWAY FROM MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD FAVORABLY IMPRESSED BY APPARENT SINCERE DESIRE FOR PEACE AND BY WHAT CONGRESSMEN FELT WAS GREATER FLEXIBILITY ON PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION AT GENEVA THAN THEY HAD EXPECTED. HOWEVER, ON REREADING TEXT OF PRESIDENT'S

REMARKS (SEPTTEL) DELEGATION MAY FIND THERE WAS LITTLE REAL GIVE IN ASSAD'S POSITION.

2. CODEL MET SEPARATELY JULY 10 WITH JEWISH COMMUNITY LEADERS HAMRA AND TOUTAH. LATTER WAS ACCOMPANIED BY SYRIAN SECURITY OFFICIAL. IN COMPOSITE THEY DESCRIBED CONDITIONS AS BETTER THAN IN PAST, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO INTERNAL TRAVEL, ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES AND GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT, COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. AREAS WHERE THEY HOPED TO SEE FURTHER IMPROVEMENT INCLUDED RIGHT TO EMIGRATE AND TRAVEL FREELY OUTSIDE SYRIA, FREEDOM FOR UNMARRIED GIRLS TO MARRY OUTSIDE COUNTRY, REMOVAL OF RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION FROM IDENTITY CARDS AND FREEDOM TO BUY AND SELL REAL PROPERTY AND AUTOMOBILES WITHOUT GOVERNMENTAL PERMISSION. BOTH PLACED SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON SITUATION OF GIRLS (529 ACCORDING TO TOUTAH) WHO COULD NOT FIND HUSBANDS. TOUTAH ASKED CONGRESSMAN MIKVA TO EXPRESS COMMUNITY'S APPRECIATION WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD AND SAY COMMUNITY LEADERS HOPED TO BE RECEIVED BY ASSAD IN NEAR FUTURE. CONGRESSMAN MIKVA DID PASS TSE MESSAGES DURING MEETING WITH ASSAD.

3. AT AMBASSADOR'S DINNER JULY 9 IN HONOR OF CODEL, CONGRESSMEN HAD OPPORTUNITY TO MEET DR. MOHAMMED AL-IMADI, MINECON; DR. MOHAMED AYYOUBI, MINFIN, AMB. HAMUD AL-SHUFU, DIRECTOR AMERICAN AFFAIRS, MFA, DR. GEORGE JABBOUR, DIRECTOR CONFIDENTIAL

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RESEARCH, THE PRESIDENCY, AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF SYRIAN PROFESSIONALS AND BUSINESSMEN. CONVERSATIONS DURING COURSE OF DINNER TENDED TO MIRROR DISCUSSIONS CODEL HAD ENGAGED IN WITH PRESIDENT AND FONMIN. CONGRESSMEN DID NOT DISCOVER SIGNS OF MUCH FLEXIBILITY BUT WERE PLEASED WITH SERIOUSNESS OF SYRIANS AND WITH GREATER RESTRAINT THAN HAD BEEN EXPECTED IN SYRIAN DISCUSSION OF ISRAEL. FOR EXAMPLE, DR. JABBOUR HAD LONG DISCUSSION WITH OBEY ON NATURE OF BEGIN GOVERNMENT AND INDICATED CONCERN OVER BEGIN'S RECENT AGGRESSIVE STATEMENTS AND FEAR THAT, AS MAN OF PRINCIPLE, BEGIN COULD NEVER SHOW NECESSARY FLEXIBILITY TO MOVE TOWARD PEACE.

4. EMBASSY WAS VERY PLEASED WITH IMPRESSION CODEL AND SYRIANS MADE ON EACH OTHER AND BELIEVES THAT MORE VISITS FROM CONGRESS BY MEMBERS LIKE HAMILTON, OBEY, MIKVA AND ROSENTHAL WILL SERVE US INTERESTS WELL.
MURPHY

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